

SPRIT PHOTOGRAPHS THAT WERE FRAUDS

An Actress Discusses Methods of David Belasco and Basil Dean

Nevil Maskelyne, Famous Magician, Cites Cases Where London Mediums Were Exposed and How They Worked—Says Conjurers Can Outdo Them With Camera and in Seance—Conan Doyle Deceived

By NEVIL MASKELYNE, The World Famous Magician.

ARDENT believers in spiritualism cannot understand why so many persons frankly deny spiritualistic phenomena. The believers point to famous men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and ask since these high trained and analytical minds are likely to be deceived by mediums.

Spiritualists say that whereas the ordinary person may be deceived by clever mediums, the trickery would quickly be unmasked by men of science.

It sounds reasonable to assert that men of science who have made wonderful discoveries would not easily be taken in—neither would they if they approached spiritualism with the same open mind with which they approach their scientific problems and make their scientific discoveries.

The scientist is supposed to take nothing for granted. He tests everything. But the scientist who embraces spiritualism owing to the death of some loved one is biased. That part of his brain which subjects everything to keen analysis ceases to operate so far as spiritualism is concerned.

The fact that a scientist may be deceived in business is surely proof that he may be deceived over spiritualistic phenomena. I have deceived many scientists with my tricks, so I know they are as gullible as ordinary folk.

The place occupied by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in spiritualism is a very high one, and his opinion exercises a big influence among spiritualists and others. He is a man of the highest integrity, and since the loss of his son he has been a firm believer in spiritualism.

Some considerable time ago he attended a seance given by a medium who wore a mask. The medium gave an astonishing exhibition of her powers, and the seance was a success. The result was that an action was brought for breach of contract, and during the trial it was admitted that the whole thing was trickery from beginning to end, and that Sir Arthur and the others were mistaken in thinking that the information which so astounded them was furnished by spirits.

The strange thing about spiritualists is unaffected by this exposure. They dismiss it as being of no account.

Scientists' Search for Ecstasies Proves Futile

Sir Arthur also firmly believes that some mediums can materialize from their own bodies a certain strange substance which the spiritualists refer to as ectoplasm. He asserts in perfect good faith that he has seen it done and that he has held some ectoplasm in his hand.

A French medium known as Mlle. Eva has achieved fame in spiritualistic circles for being able to produce this ectoplasm. During his tour Sir Arthur attended some seances given by this medium, and came away with the idea in his mind that she actually produced this peculiar substance.

The remarkable powers claimed for this medium attracted so much attention in Paris that eventually it was arranged that her powers should be tested by four French scientists. The test comprised five seances, and the scientists conducted them as carefully as possible and with open minds.

The seances took place in one of the laboratories in the famous Sorbonne. A cabinet with black curtains was fitted up for the medium, who was stripped to the skin and was thoroughly searched before entering the cabinet. The experiments were conducted in a dark room in order to give the medium the most favorable conditions possible. At the same time it will be realized that the darkness did not help the scientists in their investigations.

The report of the scientists throws a light over these sittings in the dark. The medium failed to materialize the much discussed ectoplasm. She had no opportunity of producing this strange substance, and she failed to convince the scientists that she produced it once.

The scientists saw her make those muscular contractions of the stomach such as a person makes who is willfully trying to vomit. On two occasions she produced something in her mouth. The first time she seemed to be manifesting very quickly and something emerged for about two inches between her lips. The scientist switched a flashlight on it to examine it properly, but instantly the medium turned her head and the so-called ectoplasm disappeared in her mouth. The second time a substance something like India rubber emerged from her mouth for half an inch and quickly disappeared again.

It is not strange that a medium who is said to have produced ectoplasm on so many other occasions should fail to produce any in these tests? The report proves that anything seen during seances can be accounted for in a perfectly natural manner.

If this is the best Mlle. Eva can do in the way of manifestations, her powers are insignificant compared with some persons I can put forward for tests. These will submit to tests in a nude state in full daylight. They can be searched thoroughly and nothing will be found. They can, if desired, be locked in a safe, and when the safe is opened they will be found holding a gold watch or something similar. They will go further and repeat the tests before scientists, under their very eyes.

In their case the stomach will be seen to undergo the same contractions made by a person trying to vomit, and in the end they will take the watch or knife from the mouth. You could not possibly find anything on these people if you searched them for a week. But if you took X-ray photographs of them you would find the articles in question in their stomachs. It would be sheer trickery.

I would back my conjurer, who does swallowing tricks at a country fair, to beat Mlle. Eva's performance easily, and that is why the talk about ectoplasm makes me smile. Spiritualists may look upon the medium's powers as supernatural, but I cannot.

Sir Arthur caused a good deal of comment by publishing some time ago an article about fairy photographs illustrated by reproductions of photographs that were alleged to be those of real fairies. There is no question that Sir Arthur honestly thought the photographs to be those of genuine fairies, but there are not many photographers who would care to back up Sir Arthur's opinion.

The queer thing about these fairies was that they were exactly like those elves and fairies we see pictured in books by various artists.

I happen to know of one or two persons exceedingly clever at making fairies from feathers and various other things such as butterfly wings. When photographed these fairies can be told from real fairies, as human beings conceive them to be, although they are faked and made by human hands.

them to prepare a special packet of plates for the experiments, plates marked in such a way that it was impossible to substitute others for them without discovery. The makers eventually exposed the plates to X-rays so that four plates when developed in the ordinary way would show one-fourth of their trade mark, a lion rampant, and when these plates were put in their proper order the whole design would appear. Four more plates were treated in the same way and six of these prepared plates were made up for the test.

The evidence of Mr. Price concerning the experiment is fully set forth in his pamphlet, "Cold Light on Spiritualistic Phenomena." He placed two plates in the dark slide in the dark room, and while he was doing up the remaining plates he saw Mr. Hope turn away and put the dark slide to his left breast pocket. Afterward the medium handed Mr. Price a slide, and they went to take the photograph.

Mr. Price, however, had taken the precaution of marking the slide he had loaded, and when he looked at the slide Mr. Hope had handed back to him, he found it was not the one he had marked. The two plates were exposed, and when they were developed there was a so-called spirit photograph on one, but the X-ray design was missing!

Two Skeptics and a Conjurer's Spirit Photo

W. Marriott, psychic expert, who proved to Conan Doyle and an editor that he could obtain spirit photographs by trickery.

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